

Hugh L. Cole

GREEK LETTER SOCIETIES
IN PRINCETON
1875

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THE GREEK LETTER SOCIETIES
IN
PRINCETON COLLEGE.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

AND

ARGUMENTS

OF

HUGH L. COLE, Esq., AND OF JONATHAN EDGAR, Esq.,

IN BEHALF OF THE

PRINCETON COLLEGE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

OF THE

CITY OF NEW YORK,

BEFORE

THE TRUSTEES OF THE COLLEGE,
AT PRINCETON, N. J.,

On the 22d day of December, 1875.

PRINTED BY ORDER OF THE ASSOCIATION.

Princeton university. Princeton alumni
association, New York City

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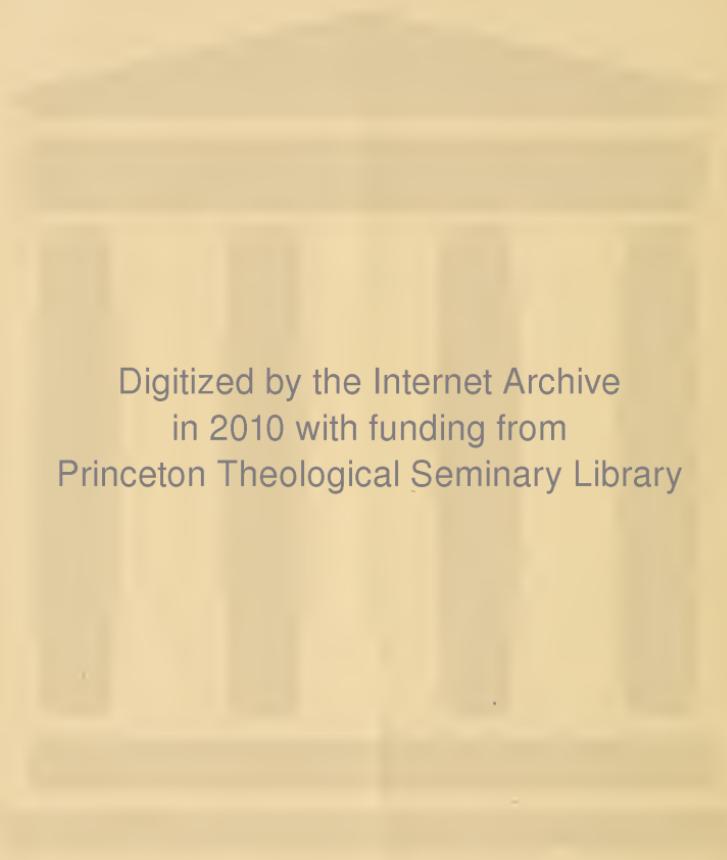
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REPORT.

At a meeting of the Princetown College Alumni Association of the city of New York, held at Delmonico's, on the 3d of December, 1875, Parke Godwin, Esq., in the chair, on motion of Dr. Woolsey Johnson, seconded by James W. Alexander, Esq., it was unanimously

“Resolved, That a committee be appointed by the Executive Committee of this Association to confer with the trustees of Princeton College as to the propriety of removing “the prohibition of the so-called Greek letter societies in “the college.”

At a meeting of the Executive Committee held on the 5th day of December, the following gentlemen were appointed such committee :

<i>Hugh L. Cole, Esq.,</i>	Class of 1859,
<i>Jonathan Edgar, Esq.,</i>	“ 1843,
<i>Dr. Woolsey Johnson,</i>	“ 1860,
<i>James W. Alexander, Esq.,</i>	“ 1860,
<i>Hon. Alex. T. McGill,</i>	“ 1864.

On the 22d day of December, the committee proceeded to Princeton, and appeared before the Board of Trustees of the college at their regular semi-annual meeting. Arguments were made by *Mr. Cole* and *Mr. Edgar* in favor of the removal of the prohibition of the societies, and more especially of the pledge required of matriculants not to join them.

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The trustees, after hearing certain members of the College Faculty in opposition to the proposed change, decided not to take any action upon the matter at this time.

As by the arrangements of the trustees the committee were not present when the faculty made their defense, it is not known what they said.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee held on the 3d day of January, 1876, it was resolved "that the arguments of Mr. Cole and of Mr. Edgar be printed for the information of the Association."

The committee respectfully submit the foregoing and the said arguments as their report.

HUGH L. COLE,
JONATHAN EDGAR,
WOOLSEY JOHNSON,
JAMES W. ALEXANDER,
ALEXANDER T. MCGILL, }
Committee.

New York, January 6th, 1876.

ARGUMENT
OF
HUGH L. COLE, ESQ.

GENTLEMEN OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

I do not propose to consume the time of your Honorable Body with any apology for our appearance here, or for the action of the Association in obedience to whose behest we come. The *Alumni* of the city of New York take it for granted that you will be glad to consult with your younger brothers concerning the things which appertain to the welfare of our common mother. It is our solicitude for that welfare, and that alone, which has induced our Association to send us here, and us to leave the avocations of our busy lives to come.

At a meeting of the *Alumni* Association of the city of New York, held on the 3d day of December, instant, unprecedented in size and in *personnel*, the following resolution was, after long and earnest discussion, unanimously adopted :

“ *Resolved*,—That a committee be appointed by the Executive Committee of this Association to confer with the

trustees of Princeton College as to the propriety of removing the prohibition of the so-called Greek letter societies in the college."

As chairman of the committee and its appointed "spokesman," I beg to submit to your Honorable Body the following considerations:

The Greek Letter Societies have been prohibited in the college for about twenty years, the authorities having sought to exterminate them in the year 1855, by requiring candidates for matriculation to take the following pledge:

"We, the undersigned, do individually for ourselves promise, without any mental reservation, that we will have no connection whatever with any secret society, nor be present at the meetings of any secret society in this or any other college so long as we are members of the College of New Jersey; it being understood that this promise has no reference to the American Whig and Cliosophic Societies. We also declare that we regard ourselves bound to keep this promise, and on no account whatever to violate it."

Recent events conclusively show that this pledge, and all the other means heretofore resorted to, have utterly failed in effecting their desired purpose, and that the societies, up to a few weeks ago, were existing here in a flourishing condition; and that the only reason which the authorities have to doubt that they *still* exist and flourish here is a new pledge from men who, confessedly, do not regard such pledges as of binding weight upon their consciences, to the effect that the societies have been disbanded, and will not be reorganized. So that the evil is a live one, and one with which your Honorable Body has still to deal as such.

Before considering the relation of these Greek letter societies to the college, it is necessary to consider the essential character of the societies themselves.

I.

My first point therefore is, that the Greek letter societies are not bad in themselves.

All wrongs classify themselves, naturally, as well as artificially, into *mala prohibita* and *mala in se*; but, one of the most difficult tasks with which the publicist or the logician has to deal is to convince "the powers that be" that a given action, which for a long period of time has been regarded, and dealt with, as *malum prohibitum*, may, in point of fact, be very far removed from being *malum in se*.

This is the difficult task which now confronts our committee. From the very nature of the subject matter, there is but one avenue of approach to the truth in this regard, namely, the testimony of men who are members of the societies in question, and who, therefore, alone can *know* their character and design.

I, myself, am a member of a Greek Letter Society, having joined it nearly twenty years ago at the University of North Carolina, and two of my colleagues are also "Fraternity men." For ourselves we beg to assure your honorable body that in our respective societies there is nothing which, by any stretch of the human imagination, could be tortured into evil, or which could fairly be regarded as naturally leading to dissipation or vice.

Our committee have been at infinite pains to ascertain the opinion of leading men in all the professions, and especially of learned professors and officers of colleges concerning the subject matter, and we have received careful responses from most of the leading colleges. In no case has there been an intimation that the societies could be properly regarded as *mala in se*.

Within your honorable body there are several gentlemen who belong to several of the Greek letter societies. To them we refer you most confidently for information on this point.

Within the faculty of the college, at this moment, are five or six gentlemen who are members of those prohibited fraternities. From *them* your honorable body may, profitably perhaps, seek for light.

The rolls of the Greek letter societies bear upon their faces many of the most honored names in church and state—names of men who still are proud to keep up their connection with those societies, and who will gladly furnish such facts as are necessary to enable you to decide this question. To those rolls, to those honored and honorable men we beg to refer you for a vindication of the character of the prohibited societies.

II.

But it is contended that whether or not the Greek letter societies are bad in themselves, they are certainly bad in their influence: First.—Upon the undergraduate members. Second.—Upon the Cliosophic, and American Whig Societies.

Both of these assumptions seem to be without foundation in fact.

*First.—*As to the influence of the societies upon the undergraduate members.*

It is difficult to perceive, if it be granted that the societies are not vicious in themselves, how their influence upon the members who compose them can be vicious.

* President PORTER, of Yale College, in reply to a letter from one of this committee, asking for information concerning the Greek Letter Societies in his college, replies: "They have *not* seriously conflicted with the discipline of the college, nor have they injuriously affected the morals of the students, or in any way interfered with the accepted system of collegiate education, or embarrassed the faculty in executing college law. Their general influence upon their members has been in many cases very good, both intellectually and morally."

These societies are either *purely literary*, *half literary* and *half social* or *purely social*.

As to the first class, there can be no possible objection under this head.

As to the second class, in so far as they are *literary*, it must be conceded that they are harmless; and the evil, if any, must lodge in that part of their dual nature which is *social* and not *literary*.

The trouble, then, upon its face would seem to be with the *social* element of these prohibited societies; and, indeed, in my day, it was this social element which seemed to be the main point of attack. But it will appear that the present college authorities, who claim to have peculiar facilities for information in this regard, are of opinion that purely social societies or *coteries* are not *in themselves* objectionable. In this connection I refer to "*The Princeton Bric-a-Brac*," a publication issued by the permission, if not with the co-operation, of the college authorities, and by which it is abundantly evident that social clubs, whose object is sufficiently indicated by engravings, and even by punning collocations of the terrible greek letters themselves, to be no higher than *eating* and *drinking*, are allowed, and perhaps encouraged, by the very authorities themselves, who see in the regular Greek letter societies the sum of all iniquity.

Cliques and *coteries* are inseparably incident to college life, and the authorities of Princeton College, after a contest of twenty years, have arrived at a point when, according to the college code, a student must be dismissed for belonging to a society called "*K. A.*" or "*A. K. E.*," and yet another student may safely belong to another society called "*A. Ω.*" or by the epicurean and soul-stirring punning collocation of "*H. N. Π.*"

Now, it is an open secret that whereas the first-named societies, and others like them, are, to a certain extent at

least, literary in their character and aims, and embrace among their members hundreds, nay thousand, of the greatest and best men in all our land ; that on the other hand the last-named societies or clubs confessedly and avowedly have no higher aim than the gratification of the appetites, and the cultivation of social and convivial enjoyment among their members ; and yet it is apparent that for all purposes of mutual support in college elections and mutual influence, at least for evil, upon individual character, the societies of the latter class are as efficacious as those of the former.

Nor is it an answer to this argument to allege that these permitted societies are mere "*eating clubs*," because, in point of fact these "*eating clubs*" are exclusive (membership to them being only attained by election) and the bond of union is quite as tangible and strong when cemented at a dinner table, as when welded at the "*mystic altars*" of the "*fraternities*."

Now, I submit that this condition of things is the strangest anomaly which men were ever called upon to analyze, or to explain.

With a confusion of ideas almost as remarkable as the above, some opponents of the Greek letter societies argue thus :

" Certain young men come to college good and pure ; they join Greek letter societies :

" After a lapse of time they lose their purity, and, in some lamentable instances, become dissipated men.

" *Ergo*, Greek letter societies are evil in themselves, and should be suppressed."

I have in my mind another class of young men. *They*, too, come here pure and good. *They* join the Philadelphian Society ; they attend prayer meetings, and connect themselves with the church. After a lapse of time, in some lamentable instances, they, too, become dissipated men.

Now, what would you, gentlemen of the Board of Trustees—what would the learned gentlemen of the faculty think—if, from such premises as those I should conclude that the “Philadelphian Society,” the college prayer meeting, and the church of God, were the cause of these deplorable effects, and therefore to be regarded as evils, and banished from the life of the student.

Such a syllogistic travesty would be an insult to your intelligence; and a proclamation of my own want of ingenuousness and candor, which you would not be slow to repel with scorn and contempt.

The truth is, that the Greek letter societies, like all college *coterie*s, exercise an influence for *good* or for *evil* in precise proportion as those societies are controlled by *good* or by *bad* men.

An experience of many years in this and other colleges makes it abundantly evident that the societies will continue to exist in spite of everything which the authorities can do to prevent. As long as they are under the ban of college law—as long as pledges are required of matriculants not to join them—it is assumed that many of the best and most conscientious students will be kept out of their ranks, and that the societies will be left to the control of an inferior class of men, whose influence upon neophytes whom they shall be enabled to influence into their ranks, will necessarily be for evil. And this bad effect will be the more certain and uncontrollable just in proportion as the crusade of the college authorities shall succeed in driving the prohibited societies into a state of seclusion and lawlessness.

On the other hand, both common sense, and the experience of other colleges, show that if the societies are recognized by the college authorities, as existing elements in college life, they can be so regulated and controlled as to be made powerful coadjutors, with the authori-

ties, in the management and discipline of the college. Indeed, wherever societies are openly recognized, the best of them insist that their members shall conduct themselves as *gentlemen*. The badge, which, *here*, is never allowed to be worn, is as jealously guarded by the societies, as is the uniform of the soldier or the cloth of the divine ; and a youth who brings his society into disrepute by “ disgracing his badge,” is liable to be disciplined in a way which, to him, is far more terrible than any discipline which the college authorities have it in their power to inflict.

*In this connection, I cannot forbear from quoting from the letter of the venerable Doctor Hodge, recently printed in the New York *Tribune*, who, in referring to the condition of the societies in this college, truthfully and pertinently observes.

“ The very fact that they have to carry on a system of “deception and concealment is itself demoralizing. Should “an officer of the college make his appearance, they scatter “as acknowledged criminals before a policeman. Is this a “healthful influence? Is this the way to develop manliness “and independence of character?”

What reprehension can be too strong of a system of college government which has for its resultant, after a trial of twenty years, that the relations between a considerable body of the students and the faculty can be justly likened to those, between “acknowledged criminals,” and “police officers.”

But it is to be observed that in colleges where this “demoralizing system of deception and concealment” does not pertain, that the faculty become members of the Greek Letter Societies, and instead of acting as “policemen” to “scatter acknowledged criminals,” are enabled to enact the better part of guides, counsellors and friends towards the students,

* This and the three following paragraphs have been inserted since the argument was presented to the trustees.

not only in the class-room, but also in all the relations of social life.

The conclusion from these considerations would seem to be that it is better to keep these societies in the full blaze of day, and so under full control of the authorities than to drive them into bad hands, and into the dusky gloom of secrecy, where they can not only escape control, but even observation.

Second.—As to the influence of the prohibited societies on the “*Halls*.”

Here, again, we are confronted with a most remarkable confusion of ideas as to cause and effect. It is gravely argued that because the *Halls* fail to prove as attractive to the average undergraduate of to-day as they did to his predecessor of a quarter of a century ago ; and as, on the other hand, the Greek letter societies have originated and become popular with the students, that it follows as a logical conclusion that the Greek letter societies are deleterious to the *Halls*.

I am quite sure that such logic as this would not pass muster in the class-rooms of our *alma mater*, even as emanating from the merest neophyte in the mysteries of the construction of the syllogism. I assume it to be a fact that the *Halls* have deteriorated ; but I am quite certain that, at least in part, that deterioration has proceeded from other causes than the existence of the Greek letter societies. Among these causes seem to me to be the following :

1. The gradual change in the character and habits of thought of the American students, especially of those from the South. Twenty years ago to be a good “*speaker*” was considered the *summum bonum* of a young man’s education, and every Southern student looked upon the “*stump*,” the *forum* and the *senate*, as the natural and almost only outlet

for his ambition. Now, happily, all this is changed, and there are hundreds of occupations to prepare for which requires patient labor and earnest endeavor, and, in the end, sound, ripe scholarship, but in which speaking finds little or no place.

2. The taking from the Halls the control of the election of junior orators.

This was very like taking from the human body the living heart. No wonder that thereafter the life-blood ceased to flow.

The fatal effect of this mutilation of the Halls was foreseen and predicted by many of the best men, both among the undergraduate members and the *alumni*, before it was consummated; and it would be amusing, if it were not somewhat exasperating, to the men who protested against this action on the ground that it would surely kill the Halls, to see the effect when produced, as predicted, attributed to a totally different cause.

3. The crusade against the Greek Letter Societies, and not the fact of their existence.

In the class of 1855 there were forty-six, Greek Letter Society men out of a total of sixty-one. At that time the Halls were never more flourishing, and it was practically impossible for a man to remain in college without connecting himself with one or other of them. Then began the crusade against the Greek Letter Societies, with the result that there are at present ninety men in the college who do not belong to either of the Halls.

The history of the Halls may furnish an argument against the *prohibition* of the Greek Letter Societies; but, assuredly, in the light of these facts, none against their *existence*.

No, gentlemen, the true cause of the deterioration of the Halls is to be found in the change of policy of the college authorities towards those ancient and venerable institutions.

While they were sovereign and independent they flourished. As soon as they were shorn of their prerogatives, and induced to intermeddle with the discipline of the college, to propose test-oaths and outside prohibitions upon candidates for membership, they naturally became odious to the very class of men who under the old order of things would have been among their most loyal and useful subjects.

III.

If the Greek Letter Societies are not evil in themselves, or in their effect upon the morals of the undergraduates, and if it is at least doubtful whether or not the Halls have been injured by them, the prohibition of the societies is useless : and, if useless, then positively hurtful.

This proposition seems to require no argument. The theory of government, at least from the American point of view, is that they are *best* governed who are *least* governed; and this is as true of colleges as of nations.

Whether or not the Greek Letter Societies commend themselves to the taste, or even altogether to the *judgment*, of the college authorities, they should not be prohibited unless it clearly appears that they are pernicious, and that they cannot be reformed or controlled. The very fact these societies are put so prominently forward in the scheme of college government gives them greater importance ; and, to use words of a leading metropolitan journal when reviewing this subject a few weeks ago, “ make them to the average undergraduate absolutely irresistible.”

IV.

The element of secrecy ought not to weigh against the Greek Letter Societies in the minds of gentlemen, who themselves are members of the Clisophic and Whig societies.

It is well known to all *alumni* of Princeton College that the Halls have always been conducted with the greatest possible secrecy, so much so, that no one is even admitted within their sacred precincts except such as have previously been initiated into their mysteries. The experience of more than a century seems to point to this secrecy as an element of strength, and no objection to it has ever been hinted at.

V.

But, whether the societies are prohibited or not, one thing is abundantly evident—that the pledge, which is now made a condition precedent to matriculation in the college, should no longer be required of candidates.

This pledge has been in existence for twenty years. Presumably, every student who has matriculated at the college within that time has subscribed thereto. Recent events abundantly prove that the pledge has not been efficacious in eradicating the societies, and the conclusion is that great numbers of young men have taken this pledge and subsequently violated it.

Even if the societies were vicious, this mode of attacking them would be open to the severest criticism, leading, as it assuredly does, to the inculcation, if not of direct and open falsehood, certainly of a habit of evasion of the truth, which is, perhaps, even more deleterious to the youthful mind.*

* The venerable President HOPKINS, of Williams College,—than whom no living American has a higher position among the educators of our youth—in a temperance address delivered in New York, made the following remarks: “At one time the trustees” (of Williams College) “passed a law requiring “every student entering the college to pledge himself not to use intoxicating “drink during term time and on college ground. This law was in force for a “number of years, but it was found that the consciences of students, many of “them at least, were very elastic in regard to a pledge which they regarded as

But when it is considered that the pledge is taken concerning a matter of no vital importance one way or the other, it becomes the duty of every lover of the college to insist that this temptation shall be removed from the students.

Another consideration, although upon a lower plane than the above, is that the parents and guardians of young men about to join college, will be most unwilling to send sons or wards to an institution which, for a quarter of a century, has been in a state of constant war with its own students upon a subject in itself so trivial, but which, leading as it does, from time to time, to the dismissal of many students from the college, has been in its results so disastrous.

An instance of this natural feeling among parents has recently been brought to my attention, in which a mother congratulated herself that her sons had not gone to Princeton College, because one of them had informed her that had he done so, he should have joined one of the Greek Letter Societies, which, in her judgment, would have been a source of endless trouble and regret; and this although her husband and all her own family had been Princeton men.

In conclusion for ourselves, and for the *Alumni Association* of the city of New York, we beg to assure your honorable body of our undiminished respect for yourselves, and the gentlemen of the Faculty, and of our ardent and undying affection for our *Alma Mater*.

“enforced, and the attempt to isolate the college by placing it under a different social law from that of the general community was abandoned.”

Professor THATCHER, the senior professor of Yale College, on being interrogated on this point, since this argument was delivered, (as the best Yale authority except the president, who was absent,) replied that in Yale College “no such pledge is required or even proposed; that in practice such a pledge binds only so long as there is no temptation to break it, and that “any attempt to require it, in his opinion, would have a demoralizing effect “upon young men.”

We have recently reorganized our Association, added very largely to its numerical strength, and are assured that it is now upon a firm and lasting foundation.

It is our desire that our sons and younger brothers shall not be induced to stray away from the care of our *Alma Mater*. But we are perfectly assured that unless the policy of the authorities of the college in regard to these societies is changed, that which we deprecate will come to pass. These considerations, and these alone, as I said at the outset, have induced us to take the steps we have in this connection, and we feel sure that whether or not we have been able to impress our views upon your honorable body, you will not misapprehend the motives which caused us to make the effort so to do.

We beg to tender your honorable body our thanks, and the thanks of the Association which we represent, for the courtesy which you extended to us in giving us this hearing, and for the patience with which you have listened to the considerations which we have felt it our duty to lay before you.

At the conclusion of Mr. COLE's address, Mr. EDGAR, by invitation of the Trustees, made a few impromptu remarks, in substance as follows:—

I have been told that I was placed upon this committee as a representative of those alumni who graduated before the existence of the Greek Letter Societies at Princeton, and consequently free from any primary bias of opinion in favor of these societies.

When first called upon to act I hesitated, in consequence of my prejudice against secret societies in general, in church, state or anywhere else, and for the further reason that in the matter of the government of our college I have great faith in the wisdom of its trustees.

But feeling that a duty had been put upon me which I should perform faithfully, I have carefully considered the subject of the resolution under which we act, and have come to the conclusion that the secret societies in our colleges are not in themselves pernicious, and consequently should not be a subject of college discipline.

I cannot from my own experience or knowledge say anything for or against them, as I have never belonged to one of them, but I have diligently sought information in reference to them from college presidents, professors and eminent graduates of various institutions who had, while students, been "society men," and the testimony of these gentlemen has been almost unanimous and without qualification in their favor.

Of course, from the very nature of their secrecy, I have learned nothing but results, but I have failed to learn that these results are bad. On the contrary, I find that the recollections of "society" life and its associations are more dear to many than those of the college life proper, and the distinguished and honorable positions of many men among

us are attributed by them as much to society discipline as to the college course. Every graduate of Yale who has been a member of its leading secret societies looks back to that membership with more satisfaction and pleasure than to all his college honors, and that, too, without under-estimating in the slightest degree the value of his college degree.

The objection to these societies, that they lead to unfairness in the award of college honors, does not seem to be well founded. Wherever these matters are left at all to the choice of the students, cliques and coteries will be formed for the benefit of favorites. It is human nature in all such matters to combine for concert of action and directness of purpose, and where the organized societies are known to exist, their influence, from that very knowledge, is more likely to be neutralized than where secret combinations are improvised for special occasions, whose work would only be known after it was accomplished.

Nor do they lead to dissipation, as is most persistently contended by their opponents; they rather tend to the prevention not only of dissipation, but of all other vices. A student feels the degradation of a bad reputation in his society much more than any degree of college discipline, and the *esprit de corps* of his society will go farther in helping him to resist temptation and evil than any other human influence.

The societies come in as an aid and supplement to the college studies in fitting young men for the practical duties of life, and the "society men" have been the most successful in our learned professions, and executive and legislative positions.

While light is generally preferable to darkness, the secrecy of these societies seems to be for no bad purposes but only to make their good more exclusive, just as a suc-

cessful business man will keep some of his habits of mind and thought to himself exclusively as his special property to be recognized by others only by results. This secrecy, after all, is only a bugbear to those who have never been "society men." It should not be so unless it results in apparent evils, and I cannot learn that such resulting evils exist.

If I am right in this conclusion, then it is plain that there is no necessity for a prohibition of these societies; but granting that there are objections to their existence, still the question arises whether or not their prohibition by law is the wisest course to remedy the difficulty. I do not think it is. Too much government in voluntary associations, as well as in the state, is bad, and in both evil acts only should be punished. If a student be guilty of intemperance he renders himself justly liable to college discipline, but if he be only guilty of an act which may, but will not necessarily, result in intemperance, he should not be punished for that act. But it is not charged that all the influences of these societies are evil. On the contrary, some of them are admitted to be good, and why prohibit the societies entirely because, forsooth, one of their accompaniments may be intemperance. Why exact a pledge of every student that he shall not belong to any of them because they, among other things, lead to intemperance.

Why not go to the very root of this evil, and exact a pledge that he will not drink any spirituous liquors while in college, because such drinking may lead to intemperance. Now, no college would dare to exact the latter pledge, and why should it the former.

No, gentlemen; the exaction of this pledge is demoralizing in the highest degree. It treats every student, good or bad, at the threshold of his college course, as if he were not honest. It reverses the old common law theory, that every person is presumed to be innocent until proved guilty.

Pledges of good behavior should never be exacted beforehand of students. They should be presumed to be honorable, and punished only after and for overt acts of misbehavior.

Your law of prohibition and pledge are both against the spirit of the age and the best sentiment of college graduates throughout the country. Why should Princeton be exclusive in this matter? Can you afford to ignore public opinion while fathers and guardians will select for their boys the college which has most to attract and least to offend? You are, just now, very successful, not because of this prohibition, but, in spite of it, from other influences, and the exercise of great executive ability in your management, recognized and appreciated by every lover of his *Alma Mater*.

I speak for myself, and other fathers, who wish to have our sons educated here, with much interest and solicitude upon this subject, and we entreat you, with all due respect to repeal the obnoxious law and pledge, and educate our boys to be not only scholars, but men and gentlemen.

The committee have deemed it advisable to append the following letter, which appeared in the New York *Tribune* of January 15th, 1876. The letter received a most complimentary editorial notice in the edition which contained it, in which the writer is described as an "Alumnus of distinguished attainments and position, who, with rare modesty, prefers that what he considers the truth should triumph without the adventitious aid of any man's rank or reputation."

"To the Editor of The Tribune:

"Sir,—The recent action of the Princeton authorities has brought the subject of college fraternities before the public for thorough discussion. Hitherto it has been the policy of that college to foster its two literary societies, known as the American Whig and Cliosophic Halls, by excluding the Greek letter fraternities, which have their branches in the other colleges of the country. In order to secure this end every student, at his matriculation, has been required to sign a pledge not to join any secret society other than the Clio or the Whig while a member of college. For twenty years this pledge has been exacted from each entering class under penalty of prompt dismissal if it should be broken. And yet, in spite of such stringent measures, the forbidden fraternities are said to have flourished in the college until about three years ago, when they were checked by a league of the two Halls against them; and, at the time of the recent investigation, as many as five of them were still in existence, including between 30 and 40 members. Of this number 15 were for a time dismissed as young men who had broken their word no less than the laws of the college. It should be added that some of them were students of high charac-

ter, who had kept every other pledge but this one, and whose course during their trial is acknowledged to have been honorable and praiseworthy.

“In view of these extraordinary facts two questions arise : What is the true character of college fraternities, and if any evils attend them, what is their best remedy ?

“As to the former question, it is worthy of notice that the opposition to these societies has usually come from those who do not belong to any of them, and can only speak from the position of outside critics. If it be said that in some cases the visible character of the men composing them is enough to condemn them, the reply is obvious, that in other cases it is their ample guaranty and vindication. They are known to comprise to a large extent the flower of our educated class. Their catalogues reveal the names of leading clergymen, physicians, jurists, merchants, statesmen—scholars in every walk of life. Their social reunions in our large cities now and then bring such men into public view. And it is simply incredible that persons of high, unimpeachable character could have been drawn into a pernicious organization, or would continue to sanction one which was even of doubtful value.

“It should also be remarked that the principles upon which these fraternities proceed are obvious to all observers, and are of admitted power and advantage. One of those principles, and the most fundamental, is that of congeniality. It is no more desirable in college than anywhere else to be intimate with every one, nor would it be possible to check that selective tendency which pervades all society and which is peculiarly strong among students drawn together in enthusiastic friendships that have not yet been chilled by contact with the world. That distinctions of various kinds—geographical, social, literary, religious—will assert themselves in any large academic community, and within due

limits, ought to be gratified, seems too plain to be argued. Sometimes they may form barriers to shelter a young man from degrading associations. To allow no scope in a college for such sentiments, to crush out all distinctions, and mass together five hundred students in two large literary associations, where their intercourse could only be public and formal, might be to forego some social elements and influences which for the general good it were wise to retain in their due place and measure. Indeed, loyal Clios and Whigs are themselves beginning to plead for a limited membership with special qualifications, which would simply be adopting the exclusive principle of the much-abused Greek letter fraternity.

As little need be said in defense of the principles of secrecy and affiliation which characterize these fraternities. The two Halls at Princeton are based upon an oath of secrecy, and it is generally conceded that if their doors were thrown open much of their charm would be dispelled. There is probably no other American college in which Greek letter chapters are not to be found, comprising members of the faculty as well as alumni and students. An almost universal practice would seem thus to have sanctioned them ; and to the undergraduate mind at least there is a powerful fascination in the idea of belonging to a vast hidden organization which sends its branches through our institutions of learning, which selects its approved members from every generation of students, and which is designed for some laudable object, such as literary recreation, generous friendship, high social culture, and manly honor, as well as mutual help and good fellowship through after years, even in distant lands. If the graduate member of the association finds such attractions waning as he advances in life, beyond the roseate region of college romance into "the light of common day," yet he can easily transport himself back to the time

when they seemed more real and substantial, and will at least be prepared to reckon them among those innocent elements of human nature and of student nature for which due allowance should be made in legislating upon this difficult question.

The evils which have been charged against college fraternities are not inherent in their organization, but are mainly such as might and do spring up in other circumstances. Wine and whist parties may sit late, where no Greek letters are worn ; and mischievous rings and coalitions of rings may do their work without ever putting on the guise of an esoteric polity. In fact, the fraternity organization affords some check against such evils. It is not at all probable that a widely extended combination of affiliated societies could be maintained in our colleges, year after year, for mere convivial enjoyment alone, or for any immoral purpose, even if occasionally perverted to such ends ; nor has it yet been proved by an adequate showing of facts, that the influence which these fraternities exert in college politics, in distributing class offices and honors, and managing the sporting interests, is overbearing or more than would be legitimately due to the same personal merit in other relations. Until furnished with better evidences to the contrary, we must believe that the moral and political objections to these societies have been overstated, if they are not largely imaginary. The coteries and cabals most to be dreaded are not the fraternal bonds of some intercollegiate order, but the noxious local cliques which are the spontaneous growth of bad associations, and are neither restrained by fixed laws, nor moved by honorable impulses and traditions.

The only alleged evils which seem peculiar to these fraternities, and therefore deserving of serious consideration, are the two following : 1. That they tend to injure the great

literary Halls which have been the glory of Princeton; 2. That they are not sufficiently within the knowledge and control of the college authorities. And it is a fairly debatable question whether both of these evils might not be better remedied by the policy of judicious authorization than that of indiscriminate prohibition. As to the first mentioned evil, it should be observed that the problem is no longer the simple one that it was ten or even five years ago. The older graduate may think of the Clio and Whig Societies as still able fully to meet the social as well as literary wants of the students; but with the numbers of each Hall swelling toward 200, it is no longer possible for all to participate equally in the advantages of these time-honored institutions or to find in their large, mixed assemblies any basis for close friendships and congenial tastes. So unwieldy are they becoming that some of their most loyal graduates have themselves suggested the admission of the better class of Greek letter fraternities as a possible method of meeting the overflow of students, already amounting to 80 or 90 in number. How to make due provision for the social life of this growing mass of young men is therefore the question which presses upon both the advocates and the opponents of college fraternities, and one which may only become more complicated if they are to continue under the ban. It has not yet been shown that the organization of any new local literary or scientific societies would meet this problem; nor has it been proved that if the more select fraternities were duly sanctioned, they could ever sully the historic prestige of Whig and Clio Halls or interfere with their noble mission as training schools in oratory and parliamentary debate, and the only avenues of promotion to the college stage on the night before Commencement. It might be argued, indeed, if this were the proper place, that their aggrandizement rather than their degradation would

result from the presence of smaller, rival societies, whose members could not even enter the lists for the highest literary honors without first having proved themselves qualified to become Clios or Whigs. Be that as it may, if such growing numbers of students should be left with no other outlet for their associative propensities than the two Halls, it is to be feared that in time the college might become honey-combed with worse "crowds" and "sets" and "rings" than any of the forbidden fraternities.

As to the other evil mentioned, the illicit appearance of the Greek letter societies, all experience has shown that the prohibition of an innocent thing simply makes it attractive, while the removal of the prohibition takes away from it any extraneous temptation to wrong-doing, and leaves it only its due significance or insignificance, as the case may be. If the harmless character of any of the fraternities could be guaranteed to the college, either by responsible representatives from their supreme authorities or by assurances from college officers belonging to their organization, they would at once come into the same legitimate relations as the two Halls, and all suspicion concerning them would be lulled. The risk of any evils that might still grow out of them is not to be weighed against the greater risk of injuring the conscience of a boy of sixteen by imposing upon him a pledge which is in its nature a mere measure of college policy, which debars him, as he thinks, from an innocent privilege, and which carries with it in his mind no feeling of moral approval and no sentiment of honor, except that of an exacted promise which must be fulfilled. It has been said by the venerable Dr. Hodge, in his *Systematic Theology* (vol. III, p. 316), that "a child is not competent to make a vow; neither is one under authority so that he has not liberty of action as to the matter vowed;" and that it is essential "that it be made voluntarily and observed cheerfully."

And, moreover, unlike all other initiatory pledges, whether by officers or members of a society or corporation, this pledge not only lacks the vital bond of mutual consent when made, but it is to be thereafter maintained between parties who are too often in a state of Punic warfare which has become proverbial in our colleges. The story is told of the students in a neighboring institution where such a pledge no longer exists, that by some surreptitious means they contrived to change the formula in the book of matriculation so that class after class subscribed a promise to join "another" instead of "no other" secret society than the two which were authorized.

"If the past twenty years have not proved this expedient to be a failure as well as a stumbling-block, it is difficult to see what else they can prove. The false position in which so many hundred graduates are now placed can neither indicate a peculiar obliquity in them nor a low moral tone in the college, but simply the fruits of an ill-advised, obsolete policy,

——— "the enrolled penalties

Which have, like unscour'd armor, hung by the wall
So long that nineteen zodiacs have gone round
And none of them been worn."

"The sons of Princeton have been taught by their *Alma Mater* that all human legislation is fallible, and whether it be her wisdom to continue this pledge or to expunge it, she but shares the disgrace or the honor of her own loyal children.

"ALUMNUS."

"New York, Jan. 14, 1875."



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